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SUBJECT: Haiti elections update - June 2

Ref: State 101620

11. (U) Summary: Voter registration continues to lag, but MINUSTAH and OAS are making a big push to get a significantly increased number of registration centers up and running within the next 7-10 days, and believe they are still on track for a successful registration program. The CEP's website is functioning and the OAS will begin informal email updates on registration numbers in the coming days. The CEP is hoping to finalize a slightly revised elections calendar (extending the registration period by 9 days); the IGOH will need to publish it as a decree, along with the decree needed to formalize the voter registration card as a national identity card. A publicity campaign in support of registration has finally been launched, and USAID and PD are supporting it with their programming. Political parties continue to prepare for elections, with one new Presidential candidate announced. End summary.

12. (U) For the first time in several weeks, the donor group on elections met with nearly the entire CEP May 31 and received updates on several key elections issues.

PolCounselor and USAID elections coordinator met subsequently with MINUSTAH and OAS elections officials June 1.

1. Updates on several key issues including from those discussions follow below, as well as on a few elections-related events.

Registration process

13. (U) This remains a source of great concern to us, and took up much of the three-hour donors meeting. As of June 1, only 17 registration sites (of 424 planned) have been opened, and slightly over 80,000 voters have been registered nationally. Where centers are open, the registration process has gone smoothly and by all accounts voters are showing significant interest in registering. The problem is the serious shortage of open registration centers. OAS elections chief Spehar and MINUSTAH elections chief LeChevallier outlined a series of steps to be taken in the coming days to address this. First, OAS has already increased the capacity of the open sites to accelerate registration there, and has begun sending out close to thirty mobile registration teams in different parts of the country. More importantly, they are working to get more centers open, focusing on both privately owned buildings, churches, schools, and public facilities.

14. (SBU) LeChevallier told us that the CEP has within the last week finalized contracts with private property owners for approximately 100 new sites around the country. UNOPS has been working to refurbish them (several are finished already) and within the next 7-10 days the sites will be turned over to OAS, which will install the necessary equipment and personnel and begin operations. Separately, MINUSTAH has been pressuring the Prime Minister to put at the CEP's disposal more government facilities, e.g. mayor's offices, to use as registration sites. LeChevallier told us June 1 that he was confident that at least half of the planned 424 registration centers would be up and running by June 15, and the remaining sites by June 30.

15. (U) Spehar noted that registration capacity would increase gradually over the month of June, and thought that they could reach 250,000-300,000 by the end of the month. At maximum capacity, which the OAS/CEP would reach once all the centers are open, they can register 60,000-70,000 persons per day. Even if this maximum capacity were not reached until July 1, this would still leave 40 days (until August 9, the revised date for closing registration - see below), meaning they could realistically reach 3 million registered voters out of the 4.4 million estimated. This was still less than desirable, but both she and LeChevallier firmly stated that this was a reasonable target.

16. (SBU) Comment: The UN, OAS, and CEP appear to finally be seized with the needed urgency and are focusing intently on getting registration s

Information flow

17. (U) PolCounselor asked Spehar for more frequent information updates on the number of voters registered, centers opened, etc., noting the intense interest in Washington in remaining as up to date as possible on the overall elections process. Spehar said the OAS was consciously letting the CEP itself be out in front on information dissemination, as part of the effort to make the CEP the principal entity responsible for the elections. She said the CEP website (<http://www.cep-ht.org/statistic.html>) is being updated weekly (usually on Fridays) with registration statistics, but agreed to provide more frequent information updates to Embassy personnel and other interested persons, including in Washington. (Note: The CEP's website includes a section on registration, with information on number of registered voters and breakdowns by department, age, and other factors. We will provide Spehar with email addresses of members of the sub-PCC on Democracy to enable Washington readers to receive unofficial twice-weekly updates. Those should start early next week.

Elections calendar

18. (U) CEP member Duchemin told donors that the CEP intended to finalize an electoral calendar by Friday June 3 which would be submitted to the government for publication as a decree. Although he (and other CEP members) frankly acknowledged it would be a challenge to hold to the original timetable, he stressed that no decisions had been taken to change the calendar. For the CEP, the most important date

was the installation of a new President by February 7, 2006. Currently, the CEP was considering the following calendar:

Aug 9 - registration ends (an extension of the original plan to end July 31). Candidate registration officially opens.

Aug 16 - finalize voter lists, both global and by electoral district.

Aug 26 -- Candidate registration closes.

Sep 9 -- Period for appealing and resolving candidate registration disputes ends.

Sep 12 - final candidate lists published and sent to ballot printing. Campaign begins.

Oct 9 - local elections held.

Nov 13 - first round of parliamentary and presidential elections held.

Dec 18 -- second round of parliamentary and presidential elections held.

Civic education

19. (U) The public information campaign in support of registration finally began in earnest May 22. We have been hearing frequent radio spots over the last ten days, urging Haitians to register. The campaign is being directed by the Haitian PR consortium MEDIACOM-CHP-PROCOM, which won a contract overseen by MINUSTAH in mid-May. The contract calls for a total of nearly 15,000 radio spots per month, distributed among approximately 100 public and private radio stations in the capital and in several provincial capital. Absent from the MINUSTAH briefing on this was any description of the content of the spots, but from what we have heard they are straightforward exhortations to register. A separate element of the campaign is the diffusion of small, well-produced Creole-language brochures outlining the advantages for citizens of having a voter registration/national identify card and showing how the registration process works.

110. (U) Note: USAID and PD are coordinating with MINUSTAH and the CEP to implement a public communications strategy in support of the electoral process, drawing on FY 05 ESF and PD funds.

Budget

111. (U) LeChevallier distributed an up-to-date budget document showing expenditures to date and confirming the anticipated budget shortfall of \$22,456,156. (Budget document has been forwarded to WHA/CAR.) PolCounselor took advantage of the opportunity to announce to other donors and the CEP that the U.S. had decided to contribute an additional \$8 million to help cover the shortfall. \$2.8 million of that was immediately available and would be provided directly to the OAS to help cover the registration portion of the shortage; the remaining \$5.2 million would come available later in the summer and would be provided to the UNDP-managed elections fund. PolCounselor also noted we would make an appeal to other donors in capitals to help fill the gap (reftel).

Legal framework still lacking

112. (SBU) The IGOH still needs to issue two decrees of critical importance to the process. The first is the official electoral timetable, a proposal for which as noted above the CEP has said it will submit by June 3. The second is a decree establishing the voter registration card as an official identify card for the full range of state services and purposes. Although there is widespread consensus in favor of this, and in fact the voter registration campaign is already touting the broader benefits to registering, technically the card has no legality until the IGOH adopts the decree. LeChevallier complained June 1 that the draft decree, which was submitted by the CEP (ghostwritten by MINUSTAH) several weeks ago, has been held up in the Council of Ministers by Justice Minister Gousse, who has been insisting on what LeChevallier called "unhelpful changes." LeChevallier also noted he remains concerned about several problematic clauses in the basic electoral decree concerning the electoral dispute appeals process and other issues.

International observers

113. (U) Donors briefly discussed and agreed to follow up at their next meeting the question of establishing a coordination mechanism for the many international observers likely to come for the elections themselves. Informally, some of our colleagues have suggested that the EU might be appropriate to serve in a "lead nation" role as coordinator, especially since, given their involvement in organizing the elections, the UN and OAS would have an apparent conflict of interest. The Canadian embassy distributed copies of the assessment mission for international observers conducted in April by David Lee and Andre Bouchard. Lee and Bouchard suggest the possibility of creating an ad hoc international consortium to coordinate observers who would likely come from several donor and troop-contributing countries, CARICOM, the African Union, the EU, and the Organization of Francophonie.

Women's group hosts political parties

114. (U) A local women's organization, Famn Yo La, hosted a three-day seminar for political parties May 30-June 1 in Port-au-Prince. The seminar was funded by Post's public diplomacy section and the UN women's rights organ UNIFEM and was well attended by most major political parties in Port-au-Prince. Leaders and other representatives from twenty-five parties, including among others KID, MODEREH, MIDH, Fanmi Lavalas, and FRN, presented their party's ideology and addressed the importance of women's participation in the political process.

Another Presidential candidate

¶15. (U) The conservative coalition Grand Front Centre Droit (Great Center-Right Front) held its national conference in Petit-Goave on May 29 and officially nominated party leader Hubert Deronceray as presidential candidate. Deronceray (sometimes spelled De Ronceray) is a strong supporter of re-establishing the Haitian army, and a vocal critic of Lavalas.